

APPARATUS AND METHODS FOR MEASURING REACTION BYPRODUCTS

Cross-References

5 This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/001,892, filed November 19, 2001. This application also is based upon and claims benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) of the following U.S. provisional patent applications: Serial No. 60/397,336, filed July 18, 2002; and Serial No. 60/397,166, filed July 18, 2002.

10 U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/001,892, in turn, is a continuation-in-part of the following U.S. patent applications: Serial No. 09/777,363, filed February 5, 2001; Serial No. 09/777,368, filed February 5, 2001; and Serial No. 09/777,364, filed February 5, 2001. These applications, in turn, are continuations of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/764,963, filed January 17, 2001, which is based upon and claims the benefit under 15 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) of the following U.S. provisional patent applications: Serial No. 60/249,931, filed November 17, 2000; and Serial No. 60/256,852, filed December 19, 2000.

The above-identified U.S. and provisional patent applications are each incorporated herein by reference in their entirety for all purposes.

Related References

20 This application incorporates by reference in their entirety for all purposes the following publications: Kenneth R. Castleman, Digital Image Processing (1996); and Bob

Sinclair, Everything's Great When It Sits on a Chip: A Bright Future for DNA Arrays, 13

THE SCIENTIST, May 24, 1999, at 18.

Field of the Invention

The invention relates to measuring byproducts produced by reactions between
5 chemical and/or biochemical reactants. More particularly, the invention relates to
apparatus and methods for reducing noise that typically accompanies such measurements.
The invention may provide apparatus and methods that allow two or more reaction
constituents to at least partially equilibrate toward the same approximate state before
combining them. The apparatus and methods provided also may include disposing a gas
10 of relatively low thermal conductivity between a sample and a detector. Multiwell sample
plates may be used to support a plurality of samples for parallel reaction testing.

Background of the Invention

Thermodynamics has established the interrelationship between various forms of
energy, including heat and work. Moreover, thermodynamics has quantified this
15 interrelationship, showing, for example, that in chemical and physiological processes the
difference between the energy of the products and the energy of the reactants is equal to
the heat gained or lost by the system. In an "exothermic" process, this difference is
negative, so that the process releases heat to the environment. Conversely, in an
"endothermic" process, this difference is positive, so that the process absorbs heat from
20 the environment. Thus, "calorimetry," or the measurement of heat production and/or heat
transfer, can be used to determine if a chemical or physiological process is exothermic or
endothermic and to estimate the energy produced or consumed.

The measurement of heat production and/or heat transfer in chemical and physiological processes can be quite complicated. Standardly, such measurements are made using a device known as a “bomb calorimeter.” This device typically includes a sturdy steel container with a tight lid, immersed in a water bath and provided with 5 electrical leads to detonate a reaction of interest inside the calorimeter. The heat evolved in the reaction is determined by measuring the increase in temperature of the water bath.

Unfortunately, bomb calorimeters are inadequate for the measurement of heat production and/or heat transfer in many areas of chemistry and physiology. For example, the study of processes involving uncommon and/or expensive components may require 10 analysis of samples too small for bomb calorimetry. Similarly, the high-throughput screening of pharmaceutical drug candidate libraries for drug activity may require analysis of too many samples for bomb calorimetry.

The analysis of small samples is especially problematic due to their small heat capacities and large surface-to-volume ratios. Many chemical and physiological processes lead to very small changes in temperature ($<0.05^{\circ}\text{C}$), making their analysis 15 susceptible to environmental contamination. In particular, whenever there is a temperature difference between a sample and the environment, heat can be exchanged between the sample and the environment, for example, by conduction, convection, and/or radiation, among others. Such heat exchange may quickly alter the temperature of a small 20 sample and thereby obscure any temperature change associated with a reaction.

Moreover, fluid samples such as those typically used in studies of chemical and physiological processes may initiate secondary reactions with the environment, such as

evaporation. Evaporation, by definition, is an exchange of energy (moisture is added to the air, while chemical volume is reduced). This process takes place on the surface of the sample, where the sample is exposed to the environment, and so may be especially problematic for small samples due to their relatively large surface-to-volume ratios.

- 5 Evaporation not only removes energy from the sample, contaminating the measurement, but also may increase measurement noise due to surface instability as the fluid phase changes to a gas phase.

An additional difficulty can arise when calorimetric measurements are made in the presence of water and/or ambient air, due in part to the high thermal conductivities of
10 these substances. A high thermal conductivity tends rapidly to diffuse thermal radiation generated from a particular event, masking the thermal signal of the event. Furthermore, dispensing compounds into a thermally equilibrated sample typically causes a signal disruption in the form of a temperature spike, followed by a relatively slowly decaying thermal noise band. Similar difficulties may arise when measuring other reaction
15 byproducts, such as non-thermal radiation and chemical concentrations, in the presence of water and/or ambient air.

Summary of the Invention

The invention provides apparatus and methods for measuring byproducts produced when two or more reactants are combined. The apparatus include systems and devices for
20 detecting byproducts from thermal and/or other reaction processes, and multiwell sample plates for supporting samples for use with such devices. The methods include measurement strategies and data processing techniques for reducing noise in

measurements of various reaction processes, such as chemical, biochemical, and/or thermal processes. The apparatus and methods may be particularly suitable for extracting data from small differential measurements, and for monitoring chemical and physiological processes.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a partially schematic cross-sectional view of a system for detecting thermal processes.

Figure 2 is a top view of a multiwell sample holder for use with an optical device for detecting thermal processes.

10 Figure 3 is a cross-sectional view of the multiwell sample holder of Figure 2, taken generally alone line 3-3 in Figure 2.

Figure 4 is a graph showing the infrared transmissivity of a preferred sample well material as a function of the thickness of the material.

15 Figure 5 is a pseudo-color image showing the extent and effect of thermal cross talk in sample wells in (A) the microplate of Figures 2 and 3 and (B) a standard commercial microplate.

Figure 6 is a graph showing noise envelopes associated with measurements of sample temperature taken from the (A) top and (B) bottom of a sample well after application of common-mode noise subtraction, area averaging, and frame-averaging.

20 The noise envelope associated with the top-read data is significantly larger than the noise envelope associated with the bottom-read data due to evaporation.

Figure 7 is a graph showing the size of the noise envelope as a function of the number of frames average in an image-averaging experiment.

Figure 8 is a graph showing the effects of common-mode noise and drift on thermal data collected using an infrared camera.

5 Figure 9 is a graph showing the effects of offset subtraction on thermal data.

Figure 10 is a graph showing the effects of removing common-mode noise on thermal data.

Figure 11 is a software screen for use in the display of thermal data, including temperatures and temperature differentials.

10 Figure 12 is a software screen for use in the collection and/or analysis of data from measurement and reference regions.

Figure 13 is a software screen for use in defining selected characteristics of the reference region.

15 Figure 14A is a cross-sectional view showing a compound being transferred from a compound plate to a transfer device.

Figure 14B is a cross-sectional view showing the transfer device of Figure 14A positioned in a sample well to equilibrate the compound with a sample in the well.

Figure 14C is a cross-sectional view showing the transfer device of Figures 14A-B being used to transfer the equilibrated compound to the sample well.

20 Figure 15A is a cross-sectional view showing an array of compounds being transferred to a plurality of receiver cavities in a transfer device.

Figure 15B is a cross-sectional view showing the transfer device of Figure 15A positioned in a multi-well sample plate to equilibrate the array of compounds with samples in the wells of the plate.

Figure 15C is a cross-sectional view showing the transfer device of Figures 15A-B
5 being used to transfer the equilibrated compounds to the sample wells.

Figure 16 is a graph showing temperature differential as a function of time for thermal radiation from a sample well surrounded by ambient air.

Figure 17 is a graph showing temperature differential as a function of time for thermal radiation from a sample well surrounded by xenon gas.

10 Figure 18 is a graph showing temperature differential as a function of time for heat detected from a sample well surrounded first by ambient air and then purged with xenon gas.

Definitions

Technical terms used in this application have the meanings that are commonly
15 recognized by those skilled in the art. The following terms may have additional meanings, as described below:

Common-mode noise. Typically low-frequency (<1 Hz) noise caused when internal control loops, such as the servo on a cryogenic cooler, create response changes in the detector. In an infrared camera, these noise sources may be common to each sensor
20 element and may be geometrically displaced across the sensor array. For example, at a given time, a thermal wave from the expansion of helium gas in a sensor cooler may cause slight gain changes in the sensor that cause a group of sensor elements in one

geometric region of the array to respond differently, or out of phase with, another group of sensor elements in another region of the array. In most applications, common-mode noise is insignificant; however, in high-sensitivity (<0.05°C) applications, common-mode noise may become a limiting factor.

5 **Heat.** A form of energy associated with the motion of atoms or molecules. Heat is capable of being transmitted by (1) conduction through solid and fluid media, (2) convection through fluid media, and (3) radiation through empty space.

10 **Infrared (IR) radiation.** Invisible electromagnetic radiation having wavelengths from about 700 nanometers, just longer than red in the visible spectrum, to about 1 millimeter, just shorter than microwave radiation. Infrared radiation includes (A) near IR (from about 700 nm to about 1,300 nm), (B) middle IR (from about 1,300 nm to about 3,000 nm), and (C) far or thermal IR (from about 3,000 nm to about 1 mm). Near and middle IR is infrared radiation that typically is caused by vibrations and low-level electronic transitions in molecules and that is only peripherally related to heat. In
15 contrast, thermal IR (or thermal infrared radiation) is infrared radiation that is caused or produced by heat and that is emitted by an object in proportion to the temperature and emissivity of the object.

20 **Radiosity.** The radiation emanating from an object is determined by the following parameters: (1) emissivity, i.e., the amount of radiation the object emits, (2) reflectivity, i.e., the amount of externally derived radiation the object reflects, and (3) transmissivity, i.e., the amount of externally derived radiation the object transmits. For example, the thermal power P radiated by an object may be described by the equation

$P = \epsilon\sigma AT^4$, where ϵ is the emissivity of the object, σ is the Stefan-Boltzmann constant, A is the area of the object, and T is the temperature. Emissivity, reflectivity, and transmissivity are dimensionless parameters with values that range between 0 and 1. For a given material, the sum of these parameters should equal unity, so that each parameter 5 is inversely correlated with the sum of the other parameters. A material with an opaque surface has a transmissivity of zero, so its emissivity equals one minus its reflectivity. Materials that radiate very well and absorb a large percentage of the radiation that strikes them have high emissivities.

Parasitic noise. Typically low-frequency (<0.1 Hz) noise caused by stray 10 radiation incident on the detector from within the detector housing, creating an offset in output that results in measurement error. The stray radiation may be caused by slight temperature changes internal and/or external to the detector. In an infrared camera, the error may be geometrically displaced across the camera array, as determined by the efficiency of the cold shield for the camera sensor and the baffling within the Dewar. 15 Most infrared cameras attempt to correct for parasitic noise using some form of internal calibration mechanism, such as a uniform-temperature shutter that periodically drops in front of the sensor to perform an offset compensation. These calibration mechanisms inherently interrupt measurements and can lead to measurement errors if the uniform-temperature shutter is not actually perfectly uniform in temperature. All infrared 20 radiometers have some form of parasitic noise.

Spatial Noise. Typically lower-frequency (<60 Hz) highly nonlinear noise reflecting detector artifacts caused by variations in the manufacturing process, for

example, during metal oxide vapor deposition (MOVD). In an infrared camera, these artifacts may cause slight differences in the gain or response characteristics, spectral characteristics, and/or stability characteristics of the various elements, columns, and/or rows of the sensor. Spatial noise may result in low-frequency noise or a drift component, 5 which may still remain even after performing a calibration for pixel gain and offset in the camera.

Temporal noise. Typically high-frequency (>60 Hz) random noise caused by (radiated or conducted) electronic noise, A/D quantization, 1/f noise, microphonics, and/or a low electronic signal-to-noise ratio from the detector.

10 **Thermal conductivity.** The quantity of heat transmitted, due to a unit temperature gradient, in unit time under steady conditions in a direction normal to a surface of unit area, when the heat transfer is dependent only on the temperature gradient.

15 **Thermodynamic noise.** Noise caused by thermodynamic instabilities in a medium, such as a fluid-to-gas phase transition. Surface measurements of most fluids, including water, show significant instability due to thermodynamic noise caused by evaporation.

Detailed Description

The invention provides apparatus and methods for performing calorimetry (or 20 thermogenic analysis) and for otherwise measuring various byproducts produced when two or more reactants are combined. Such byproducts may include, for example, emitted and/or absorbed heat, emitted and/or absorbed electromagnetic radiation, changes in pressure, and/or changes in concentration of various constituents such as oxygen,

hydrogen ions (i.e., pH level), and the like, among others. The apparatus include devices, such as optical devices, for detecting reactive processes, and multiwell sample plates for supporting samples for use with such devices. The methods include measurement strategies and data processing techniques for reducing noise in measurements of reactive processes. The apparatus and methods may be particularly suitable for (1) extracting data from small differential measurements (e.g., extracting thermal data using a temperature sensor such as an infrared camera), and (2) for monitoring chemical and physiological processes.

Figure 1 shows a system 100 for detecting thermal processes in accordance with aspects of the invention. The system includes an optical device 102 configured to detect thermal radiation 104 and a sample plate 106 having a sample well 107 configured to support a sample 108 for use with the optical device. The system may be used to monitor thermal processes in the sample or samples by detecting temperature changes correlated with heat production (e.g., from a chemical or physiological reaction) and/or heat transfer in the samples. This correlation may be performed using any suitable method, such as those described in the following U.S. provisional patent application, which is incorporated herein by reference: Serial No. 60/256,852, filed December 19, 2000. Moreover, this correlation may be used to examine reactions, as well as modulators such as agonists and/or inhibitors of the reactions. If there are multiple samples, the radiation transmitted from the samples may be detected sequentially from each sample, for example, by point reading, or simultaneously from some or all of the samples, for example, by image reading. The optical device may include a detector 110 such as an

infrared optical sensor configured preferentially to detect thermal infrared radiation. The detector measures thermal energy radiated from a sample (or samples) supported by the sample plate and converts the measured energy to a signal such as an electrical signal that can be converted into a temperature, for example, using a blackbody or graybody approximation. In a preferred embodiment, the detector includes an imaging device such as an infrared focal plane array (FPA) configured to obtain a time-dependent series of two-dimensional infrared images of processes occurring in samples in a multiwell sample plate, permitting measurement of temperature and temperature changes in each process, as a function of time, geometrically across the plate. The series of images typically is collected at a preselected frequency (typically >1 Hz) for a preselected period significant relative to a characteristic time of any time-dependent process being monitored. The data subsequently may be processed and/or reported at the same and/or a lower frequency. The data may be used to monitor, screen, rank, and/or otherwise analyze thermal processes occurring in the sample. The thermal analysis may be used alone or together with other measurements to assess the presence, concentration, physical properties, and/or activity of a compound or compounds in the sample. Thus, the system provides a noncontact, noninvasive method for measuring thermal properties such as temperature, in contrast to bomb calorimeters, thermometers, and capacitive and resistive circuits.

The system and its components may be configured to improve the accuracy and/or sensitivity of thermal measurements, particularly thermal measurements involving small samples and/or small temperature changes. The optical device may be configured to reduce measurement errors associated with noise, such as common-mode, parasitic,

spatial, temporal, and/or thermodynamic noise, among others. The sample plate may be configured to facilitate detection of thermal radiation through a surface of the plate and/or to reduce measurement-contaminating heat transfer between the samples and the environment (including other samples). The optical device and sample plate may together

5 be configured to reduce noise associated with evaporation, for example, by using a bottom-read detector and a sample plate having an infrared-transmissive bottom surface and in some cases a cover.

The remainder of the Detailed Description is divided into four sections: (A) optical devices, (B) noise reduction, (C) sample holders, and (D) examples.

10 **A. Optical Devices**

The optical device generally comprises any device capable of preferentially detecting thermal infrared radiation and using the detected radiation to analyze thermal processes in a sample. The phrase "capable of preferentially detecting thermal infrared radiation" means that the device is configured and/or operated so that it detects more

15 thermal infrared radiation than any other form of radiation (i.e., so that at least about half of the radiation detected is thermal infrared radiation). The phrase excludes any device that detects thermal infrared radiation only incidentally, as might occur in an optical device configured to detect visible light if thermal radiation leaked into the detector. The capability for preferentially detecting thermal infrared radiation may reflect use of one or

20 more of the following mechanisms, among others: (A) use of spectral filters preferentially to "extract" thermal infrared radiating by blocking radiation other than thermal infrared radiation, including visible, near IR, or middle IR radiation, (B) use of

detectors having enhanced sensitivity for thermal infrared radiation, and/or (C) postprocessing of a detector signal to reduce and/or compensate for any component of the signal not resulting from detection of thermal infrared radiation.

Figure 1 shows an optical device 102 constructed in accordance with aspects of the invention in use as a part of a system 100 for detecting thermal processes. The device includes a detector 110 configured to detect thermal infrared radiation emitted by a sample, a stage 112 configured to support a sample in a sample holder for thermal analysis by the detector, and a processor 114 configured to analyze radiation detected by the detector. The detector and stage are positioned such that at least a portion of the thermal infrared radiation emitted by the sample is incident, indirectly or preferably directly, on the detector. This may be accomplished by ensuring that a central axis CA of the sample wells is aligned with an optical axis OA of the instrument prior to detection of thermal infrared radiation. Alignment simply means that the two axes are sufficiently close to parallel that radiation from a central portion of the sample well is detectable by the instrument. For example, in Figure 1, the central axis of each sample well is aligned with the optical axis of the instrument. The detector may be positioned below the stage to form a “bottom-read” instrument, above the stage to form a “top-read” instrument, or in other positions to form other instruments. The instrument of Figure 1 is a bottom-read instrument, and the instrument of Figure 1 with components of the optical device 102 inverted and positioned above the stage is a top-read instrument.

The stage may be movable, so that samples may be deposited at a first position, moved to a second position for fluid dispensing, moved to a third position for thermal

equilibration, moved to a fourth position for thermal detection, and moved to a fifth position for pickup. These positions may be the same or different, and any given position (except the detection position) may be present or absent. The stage may move sample holders translationally and/or rotationally, among others.

5 The sample generally comprises any object or system of objects intended for thermal analysis. The sample may include compounds, mixtures, surfaces, solutions, emulsions, suspensions, cell cultures, fermentation cultures, cells, tissues, secretions, and/or derivatives and/or extracts thereof. The sample also may include the contents of a single sample site, or several sample sites, depending on the assay.

10 The detector generally comprises any device for preferentially detecting thermal infrared radiation and converting the detected radiation into a signal representative of the detected radiation. A preferred detector is an imaging detector, such as an infrared camera, that is capable of simultaneously viewing part or all of a sample holder. Further aspects of the detector are described below in Section B.

15 The stage generally comprises any mechanism for supporting a sample in a sample holder at an examination site for thermal analysis by the device. A preferred stage is a transporter capable of moving the sample holder vertically and/or horizontally between the examination site and one or more transfer sites where the sample holder can be loaded onto and/or unloaded from the stage.

20 The processor generally comprises any mechanism for analyzing the signal from the detector, for example, to conduct a thermal analysis. The analysis may include conversion of a signal representative of intensity and/or wavelength into a signal

representative of temperature and/or differential temperature, among others. The analysis also may include performing calculations to reduce noise and/or to facilitate data reporting, as described below. The processor may be intrinsic to the detector, extrinsic to the detector, or both. Further aspects of the processor are described below in Section B.

5 The optical device also may include a housing 116 to support and protect the detector. The housing may include, among others, an optics tube 118, an infrared-transmissive window 120, and/or a baffle 122 having an aperture 124. The optics tube may support the detector and/or components of the housing, such as the window and baffles. The optics tube also may reduce the amount of unintended thermal infrared
10 radiation entering the detector. The window may permit thermal infrared radiation to enter the housing for detection, while also permitting the housing to be sealed to reduce contamination and/or (partially) evacuated to reduce absorption and/or scattering of thermal radiation prior to detection. The window may include a portion formed of zinc selenide (ZnSe) and/or polyethylene, among others. The baffles may block stray thermal
15 infrared radiation. The optical device may be configured to shield the sample from incident radiation to reduce the proportion of the sample signal arising from transmission, reflection, and/or photoluminescence from the sample.

 The optical device also may include a data output mechanism such as a view screen or printer for reporting results of any thermal analysis. Data generally may be
20 reported using any suitable method, physical and/or electronic, digital and/or analog, and static and/or time varying, among others. Suitable methods include tables, graphs, and/or images, among others. Data may include temperatures and/or temperature differentials,

among others, at a fixed time or as a function of time. Further aspects of the data output mechanism including suitable software are described below in Section D.

B. Noise Reduction

Noise is almost invariably a problem in measurements of thermal processes.

- 5 However, noise may be especially problematic in measurements of thermal processes involving small samples and/or small temperature changes, where even minor noise can obscure or overwhelm any temperature change associated with the thermal process.

The effects of noise on measurements of thermal processes can be reduced using noise reduction techniques. Noise reduction involves identifying sources of noise (e.g.,

- 10 measurement noise, camera noise, etc.), and then developing methods for reducing or eliminating the noise and/or its effects. Unfortunately, thermal detectors such as infrared cameras are susceptible to several types of noise, including common-mode, parasitic, spatial, and/or temporal noise, among others. In addition, fluid samples are susceptible to other types of noise, including thermodynamic noise, which is caused by thermodynamic
15 transformations, such as evaporation, in which the sample changes from a fluid to a gas.

These and other forms of noise are described above, under Definitions. Thus, noise reduction in measurements of thermal processes may be facilitated by the application of one or more different methods, and/or by the repeated application of the same and/or related methods.

- 20 The present “state of the art” for infrared, radiometric cameras defines measurement performance in terms of noise-related parameters, specifically, accuracy and sensitivity. Here, accuracy is a relative absence of error or mistake, and sensitivity is

an ability to detect or measure an input, especially a weak input. The sensitivity of infrared cameras normally is quantified in terms of noise equivalent temperature difference (NETD), which is the RMS noise/response at a given temperature, f#, and operating frequency (normally 30°C, f/1, and 60 Hz). NETD typically is the limiting
5 factor in determining measurement sensitivity. A typical, state-of-the-art, high-performance infrared camera, such as the FLIR SC3000, using Quantum Well (QWIP) sensor technology, specifies an absolute accuracy of about 2°C and a sensitivity (NETD) of about 0.03°C. Unfortunately, this sensitivity may be inadequate in measurements of small temperature changes.

10 The invention provides methods for reducing noise and/or enhancing accuracy and/or sensitivity in thermal measurements, particularly measurements involving small samples and/or small temperature changes. These methods may improve upon the previous state-of-the-art sensitivity described above, potentially providing sensitivities of <0.1°C or even <0.01°C and RMS noise levels of <0.05°C or even <0.005°C, at least
15 when the methods are used on data collected with preferred sample holders.

The methods may be implemented using any suitable apparatus, such as those described above in Section A. These apparatus may include one or more processors associated intrinsically and/or extrinsically with the optical device and incorporating instructions for and capable of carrying out the functions specified by the methods. The
20 processor(s) may perform during signal acquisition by the optical device, for example, so that the most recent image is a processed image formed as a running average of the actual most recent image and a preselected number of preceding images. Alternatively, or in

addition, the processor(s) may perform after signal acquisition, for example, in a central processing unit used to run the apparatus and/or experiments conducted using the apparatus.

The methods may be performed using any suitable analysis mode, including
5 continuous (analog) and/or discrete (digital) modes, and point-reading and/or imaging modes. Thus, the signal may be collected using an analog camera (such as a video camera) and/or a digital camera (such as a charge-coupled device (CCD) camera), and/or using an analog and/or a photon-counting point-reading detector (such as a photomultiplier tube, photodiode, etc.). In an exemplary embodiment, signals are
10 collected in imaging mode, and analog signals (if any) are converted to digital signals prior to and/or during analysis. A digital signal typically takes the form of one or more digital images, which typically comprise two- or three-dimensional quantized functions that have been generated by optical means, sampled using a defined spatial pattern (such as an equally spaced rectangular grid), and represented using a defined presentation scale
15 (such as an equal level gray scale or a pseudocolor scale). A two-dimensional digital image T may be represented as an $M \times N$ matrix of values T_{ij} associated with spatial positions i and j . A series of two-dimensional digital images (such as a time series) may be represented as an $M \times N \times k$ matrix of values $T_{ij}(k)$ by further associating a time index k with each spatial value T_{ij} .

20 The methods may involve point operations and/or area operations, among others. Here, a point operation is an operation that modifies data on a point-by-point (e.g., pixel-by-pixel) basis depending only on the value and/or location of the data point. In contrast,

an area operation is an operation that modifies data on a point-by-point basis depending at least in part on the value and/or location of points in the neighborhood of the data point. The methods may involve replacing a given number of data points or images with an equal number of potentially modified data points or images. Alternatively, or in 5 addition, the methods may involve replacing two or more data points or images with a smaller number of data points or images.

The invention may involve application of one or more of the following techniques, among others, as described below: (1) low-pass filtering, (2) temporal averaging, (3) spatial averaging, (4) reference calibration, (5) offset subtraction, and/or (6) bottom 10 reading.

1. Low-pass filtering

Low-pass filtering generally comprises any method for reducing or eliminating high-frequency temporal and/or spatial noise by blocking or otherwise suppressing frequencies above a certain “cutoff frequency” while passing or otherwise promoting 15 frequencies below the cutoff frequency. Thus, to reduce high-frequency “temporal noise” in thermal images, data may be collected at a relatively high frame rate and passed through a low-pass time-domain filter to cut out the high-frequency noise. In an exemplary embodiment, full-field radiometric data are collected using an infrared camera as described above at a 60-Hz frame rate and passed through a low-pass filter internal to 20 the camera electronics to yield filtered data corresponding to a lower frame rate. Suitable low-pass filters are described in Kenneth R. Castleman, Digital Image Processing (1996), which is incorporated herein by reference. In particular, suitable low-pass filters include

- (1) simple low-pass filters, such as the box filter, triangular filter, and high-frequency cutoff filter, and (2) more complex low-pass filters, such as the Gaussian low-pass filter.
- A preferred low-pass filter includes a frame-average as described below in which the most recent image represents a frame-average of the most recent image with one, three, 5 seven, or fifteen of the most recent preceding images, among others.

2. Temporal averaging

Temporal averaging generally comprises any method for summarizing or representing the general significance of a set of unequal values of a quantity or function sampled at different times, such as determination of a mean, mode, or median value, 10 among others. In an exemplary embodiment, temporal averaging involves application of frame-averaging, among others. Here, frame-averaging may be used to reduce any residual high-frequency temporal noise remaining after application of a low-pass filter.

Frame-averaging generally comprises averaging (or otherwise smoothing) data over a series of frames. For example, a pixelated function T may be frame-averaged over 15 N frames by summing the product of the value of the function T_{ij} and a corresponding weighting factor W_{ij} in each frame k , and then dividing the sum by the sum of the weighting factors:

$$\langle T_{ij} \rangle_{FA} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^N W_{ij}(k)T_{ij}(k)}{\sum_{k=1}^N W_{ij}(k)} \xrightarrow{W_{ij}=1 \forall ij} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^N T_{ij}(k) \quad (1)$$

Here, $\langle \rangle_{FA}$ denotes frame-averaging. The weighting factors all may be equal (for example,

they all may be equal to one), or some or all of the weighting factors may have different

5 values, depending on the algorithm. The frame-averaged frame may be used to replace an input frame, typically a middle or final frame, in the series of N frames used to construct the average. The number of frames will be unchanged (absent edge effects) if each frame in a series of frames is replaced with a frame-averaged frame. In contrast, the number of frames will be reduced if two or more frames are replaced with a single frame-averaged
10 frame.

The preferred number N of frames to use in the frame-average is determined by competing factors. Generally, it is better to use a larger number of frames because frame-averaging typically reduces high-frequency random temporal noise by the square root of the number of frames averaged. However, the overall time corresponding to the number
15 of frames used in the average should be small relative to the time scale of thermal changes in the system to avoid averaging frames that differ due to actual differences in the temperature of the sample rather than due merely to noise. In the data presented below in Section D, the optimum number of frames for frame-averaging was between about 4 and 16.

Frame-averaging may be performed simultaneously and/or sequentially for different samples, and/or for measurement and reference areas.

3. Spatial averaging

Spatial averaging generally comprises any method for summarizing or representing the general significance of a set of unequal values of a quantity or function sampled at different positions, such as determination of a mean, mode, or median value, among others. Data may be spatially averaged to return a reduced number of (average) values or a single (average) value for each area as a function of time. For example, a pixelated function T may be area-averaged for a particular frame k by summing over some or all of the M pixels ij in a given area A of a frame the product of the value of the function T_{ij} and a corresponding weighting factor W_{ij} , and then dividing the sum by the sum of the weight factors:

$$\langle T \rangle_{AA}(k) = \frac{\sum_{i,j \in A} W_{ij}(k)T_{ij}(k)}{\sum_{i,j \in A} W_{ij}(k)} \xrightarrow{W_{ij}(k)=1 \forall ij} \frac{1}{M} \sum_{i,j \in A} T_{ij}(k) \quad (2)$$

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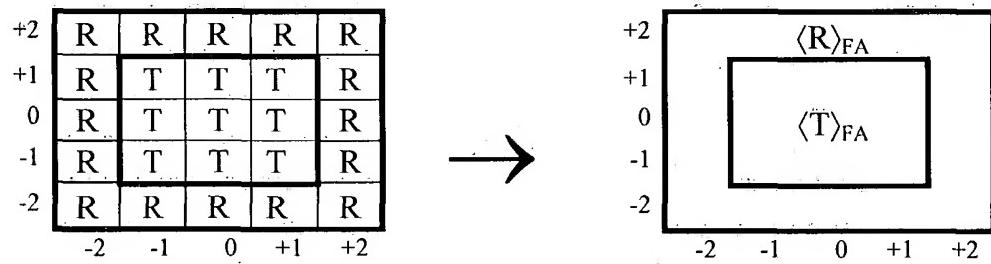
Here, $\langle T \rangle_{AA}$ denotes area-averaging. The weighting factors all may be equal (for example, they all may be equal to one), or some or all of the weighting factors may have different values, depending on the algorithm. Thus, in a sample holder having 96 sample wells each having a measurement area and a reference area, area averaging may be used to reduce the data set to as few as 96 measurement values and 96 reference values by independently averaging pixel values over all or part of each measurement and reference

area. The measurement and reference areas may be distinguished using application software implemented in the processor. Area averaging typically involves >4 pixel elements and preferably involves >9 pixel elements. Area averaging may reduce the effects of geometric, spatial noise common to most FPA detectors. Such noise may

5 reflect defective or nonlinear detector elements and/or slight differences in amplifier characteristics. In some applications, area averages may be computed as median values or mode values, as appropriate, instead of mean values.

The following table shows an exemplary algorithm for area averaging data from contiguous measurement and reference regions. The number of data points used in the

10 average and the number of averages reported by region may be selected according to any criterion or criteria. Generally, most or all of the data points unambiguously ascribable to one or the other region but not both will be used in the average, and, generally, one average will be reported for each region.



15

4. Reference calibration

Data may be calibrated using a reference standard, such as an adjacent local (e.g., perimeter) reference standard, for example, by subtracting a reference value from a

corresponding measurement value to return a differential measurement for each sample well as a function of time.

$$T_{RC} = T_{Meas} - T_{Ref} \quad (3)$$

5

Here, the measured and reference values may be properties of the thermal radiation detected from the measurement and reference regions, respectively, such as intensities, or they may be quantities derived from such properties, such as temperatures. The method may be applied pixel-by-pixel or area-by-area, among others. Subtracting reference 10 values from measurement values may reduce or eliminate common-mode noise, internal drift, and/or parasitic noise local to the region of the detector array used in the measurements. These noise sources have a tendency to be geometrically dispersed across the sample holder or sample wells, so that other noise-reduction techniques, such as single-point reference or Fourier transform characterization and subtraction have limited 15 success. These other methods have a tendency to amplify noise where it shifts out of phase relative to adjacent areas, whereas the local reference compensates for geometric shifting.

5. Offset subtraction

Data may be adjusted by subtracting one or more offsets from each measurement.

20

$$T_{OS} = T - T_{Offset} \quad (4)$$

The offset may be used to set the initial-time differential measurements for each sample well at t (time) = 0, so that there is a common starting point from which to measure
5 changes in temperature. Offset subtraction effectively creates a zero reference at the beginning of the experiment and adjusts the difference in temperature between the measurement region and associated reference region to zero. Adjusting the offset to zero may compensate for field nonuniformity resulting from camera drift prior to the start of data collection.

10 In some applications, data may be adjusted further by multiplication (or, equivalently, division) by a suitable scaling factor.

6. Bottom reading

Reading through the bottom of an infrared-transmissive sample well may reduce thermodynamic noise created at the interface of dry air and the sample. In particular,
15 evaporation at sample surfaces exposed to dry air may create a saturated gas layer adjacent the sample surface. This layer may be opaque or nearly opaque to the thermal detector and show significant instability (measured to be $>0.05^{\circ}\text{C}$). Measurement noise created by evaporation may be fivefold or more greater than measurement noise associated with reading through the bottom of the sample well or from an independent
20 black body reference. Additionally, evaporation at the surface may lower the surface temperatures measured by the camera by as much as 2°C . This 2°C difference is a heat sink for the reaction being measured. Bottom reading allows the top surface of the sample

well to be sealed so that the space above the sample becomes saturated with moisture, reducing evaporation noise and heat loss.

The application of these noise-reduction methods generally is quite flexible. For example, each method generally may be applied separately, alone or in combination with 5 any number of other methods. Moreover, each method generally may be applied in any order.

C. Sample Holders

The sample holder (or, equivalently, the sample substrate or sample plate) generally comprises any substrate or material capable of supporting a sample or samples 10 for thermal analysis. The sample holder preferably is capable of supporting a plurality of samples at discrete (i.e., individually distinct) sample sites. Suitable sample holders may include microplates, PCR plates, microarrays, chromatography plates, and microscope slides, among others, where microplate wells and biochip array sites comprise assay or measurement sites. Exemplary microplates are described below in detail. These and 15 similar sample holders such as PCR plates generally keep each portion of each sample from mixing with each portion of each other sample. Exemplary microarrays (or, equivalently, biochips) are described in detail in Bob Sinclair, Everything's Great When It Sits on a Chip: A Bright Future for DNA Arrays, 13 THE SCIENTIST, May 24, 1999, at 18. These and similar sample holders generally keep at least a portion of each sample 20 from mixing with at least a portion of each other sample, for example, by adhering the molecules of interest such as nucleic acids or proteins to specific array sites while

allowing the solvent and any associated dissolved or suspended species to move between sites.

The sample holder may include a thermal isolation structure disposed between the sample wells to reduce thermal transfer between the wells and the environment and thus

5 between adjacent wells. The thermal isolation structure may include a thermal buffer, thermal barrier, and/or isolation well, among others, as described below. The thermal isolation structure may be composed at least in part of a different material than the sample wells. The thermal isolation structure may substantially surround a central or optical axis of each sample well, isolating the wells without obstructing transmission of

10 thermal infrared radiation along the central axis. The thermal isolation structure also may be disposed such that any straight line below a plane formed by the tops of the sample wells connecting a portion of one sample well to a portion of an adjacent sample well intersects the isolation structure.

The sample holder also may include an insert member defining an array of sample

15 wells and a support member having a thermal isolation framework in a configuration corresponding to the array of sample wells. The sample wells each may have a central axis, and the insert may engage the support member such that each sample well is thermally isolated from adjacent sample wells without obstructing the transmission of thermal infrared radiation along the central axis. The thermal isolation framework may

20 include a thermal buffer, thermal barrier, and/or isolation well, among others, as described below.

The sample holder also may include an insert having a plurality of sample wells, and a thermal isolation member for supporting the insert so that each sample well can be precisely positioned along an optical path, where the thermal isolation member provides a thermally controlled thermal reference surface adjacent each well as viewed along the 5 optical path. The reference surface may define an aperture that frames the associated optical path.

A preferred sample holder is configured as a microplate having a frame and a plurality of sample wells disposed in the frame for holding a corresponding plurality of samples for analysis. This format may combine small-volume samples and a high-density 10 holder, permitting automated analysis of large numbers of samples. This format also may be configured to reduce unintended heat exchange between the samples and the environment (including between the sample and other samples) and/or to permit an optical detector to measure thermal infrared radiation transmitted through a surface of the sample holder.

15 The sample holder may include one or more of the following features, among others:

1. Thin surface

A sample well having at least one surface having a thickness of less than about 0.005 inches, and preferably less than about 0.001 inches, and most preferably less than 20 about 0.0005 inches. A thin surface may be important for at least two reasons: (1) increased infrared transmissivity, and (2) decreased thermal conductivity. These two criteria preferably may be met using a single material, such as a polymeric polyethylene

blend having a high infrared transmissivity (e.g., greater than about 50% or about 80%) and a low thermal conductivity (e.g., less than about 1 W/m-K or about 0.6 W/m-K).

A thin (i.e., reduced-thickness) surface may increase transmissivity. A thin surface may be less likely to absorb thermal energy being radiated by the sample due to its

5 shorter path length and more likely to have an outer (i.e., non-sample-contacting) surface at the same temperature as the sample, facilitating calorimetric analysis through the surface. A preferred thin surface has a high transmissivity (e.g., >80%) for thermal infrared radiation, particularly thermal infrared radiation having wavelengths between about 3 and 5 micrometers and between about 7 and 14 micrometers. (These wavelength ranges may be especially useful in thermal imaging, because they correspond to minima in atmospheric absorption.) A thin more transmissive surface preferably is located at least at the bottom of the sample well to permit detection from the underside of the sample holder using a bottom-read analyzer. The surface may be substantially (e.g., optically) flat to reduce optical aberrations during analysis through the surface.

15 A thin (i.e., reduced-thickness) surface also may decrease thermal conductivity. There are three primary mechanisms for heat transfer in the plate: conduction, convection, and radiation. Typically, conduction is the most significant mechanism, and radiation is the least significant mechanism. Conduction may be described by the equation $P = KAVT$, where K is the thermal conductivity, A is the surface area, and ∇T 20 is the temperature gradient. Thus, reducing surface area may reduce conduction. A primary path for conduction is through the walls of the sample well to contact points on the associated frame. This path may be reduced using thin-walled sample wells.

Moreover, because the thermal conductivity of air ($\sim 0.02 \text{ W/m-K}$) is less than that of the preferred well material (0.6 W/m-K), it is important to use the air as much as possible for a conduction path. Thus, the wells hold heat much like a thermos. Finally, the thermal capacitance of a thin material is lower, so that there is less change in temperature due to

5 the initial ΔT in the system. In particular, the material may be selected such that the thermal mass of the sample wells is no more than about half the thermal mass of an aqueous sample positioned in the sample well, even when the sample well is completely full. A thin less conductive surface preferably is located at least at the sides of the sample well.

10 2. **Thermal buffer**

A thermal buffer disposed between the sample wells to resist thermal transfer between sample wells, or between the environment and the sample wells. The thermal buffer generally comprises any mechanism for resisting a change in temperature. In this sense, the thermal buffer resembles a pH buffer, which resists a change in pH when an acid or base is added to a solution by binding to the added species, or an electrical capacitor, which resists a change in voltage by storing or releasing charge. The thermal buffer may be used to buffer (or keep relatively constant) the temperature of any structure adjacent the sample well, such as the trapped volume described below. The thermal buffer may include a structure having a high thermal mass (or heat capacity), which can

15 absorb heat without undergoing a significant change in temperature. This high thermal mass structure may, for example, have a substantially higher thermal mass (or heat capacity) than the sample wells and/or corresponding samples, for example, three, five, or

20

even ten times higher. The high thermal mass structure may include a metal such as aluminum and/or a high thermal capacitance plastic, among others.

3. Thermal barrier

A thermal barrier disposed between the sample wells to block thermal transfer
5 between sample wells. The thermal barrier generally comprises any mechanism for blocking the transfer of heat into or out of the sample wells or the vicinity of the sample wells, such as an adjacent trapped volume. The thermal barrier may include a material having a low emissivity and/or a high reflectivity for infrared radiation. For example, the thermal barrier may include a material that reflects at least about half of the infrared
10 radiation that otherwise would be incident upon surfaces of the sample well. Generally, emissivity and reflectivity are inversely related; thus, shiny, metallic materials tend to have low emissivities and high reflectivities, whereas matte, dark-colored materials tend to have high emissivities and low reflectivities. In a preferred embodiment, the thermal barrier includes a material having a reflectivity of at least about 0.8 and an emissivity of
15 at most about 0.2.

4. Double-walled sample wells

A double-walled sample well, formed, for example, by positioning a sample well in a corresponding isolation well. In a preferred embodiment, a plurality of isolation wells are disposed in a frame, a corresponding plurality of sample wells are disposed in
20 the isolation wells, and none of the sample or isolation wells is in fluid contact with another of the sample or isolation wells. The double-walled wells may include a trapped volume formed between an outer surface of the sample wells and an inner surface of the

corresponding isolation wells, further reducing thermal transfer to and from samples positioned in the sample wells. The trapped volume may enclose air and/or a gas of relatively low thermal conductivity, and/or it may be partially or fully evacuated relative to standard atmospheric pressure. The trapped volume also may enclose or be lined along 5 its perimeter with a thermal barrier, i.e., a material having a low emissivity and/or a high reflectivity for infrared radiation to reduce radiation thermal transfer to and from the sample well.

5. Plural optically transmissive surfaces

A plurality of optically transmissive surfaces, at least one associated with the 10 frame and at least one associated with the sample well, where the surfaces are configured so that an optical reader can detect electromagnetic radiation such as infrared radiation transmitted from a sample through both the optically transmissive surface of the corresponding sample well and the optically transmissive surface of the frame. For example, a plurality of optically transmissive surfaces may be formed by corresponding 15 surfaces of a sample well and isolation well in a double-walled well, as described above.

6. Measurement and reference regions

A combination of a measurement region and a reference region. The measurement region may be a portion of a sample well, and the reference region may be an adjacent portion of the frame, isolated from the sample well, particularly a high-thermal-mass 20 and/or high emissivity (>0.5 and preferably >0.8) surface portion capable of acting as a blackbody or graybody reference. The reference region may be composed at least in part of a different material than the sample wells and may include a metal such as aluminum.

The reference region(s) may be disposed adjacent (e.g., about or between) the sample wells, so that each measurement region is near a corresponding reference region, reducing artifacts that reflect temperature drift across the sample plate. Thus, an $M \times N$ array of measurement regions might be complemented by an $M \times N$ of reference regions

5 disposed about the measurement regions, or an $(M-1) \times (N-1)$ array of reference regions disposed between the measurement regions. The reference region may be configured as a ring or annulus distributed about or adjacent a perimeter of the sample well and/or about and preferably symmetrically about a central axis of the sample well. The reference region may be positioned about or above the top of a corresponding sample well, and/or

10 about or below a corresponding sample well. The reference regions and the corresponding sample wells may be separated by a gap such as an air gap along a line connecting each portion of the thermal reference regions and the corresponding sample wells to reduce heat transfer between the sample wells and the thermal reference regions.

15 Thermal characteristics of the measurement region may be calibrated using thermal characteristics of the reference region, for example, by subtracting the reference characteristic from the measurement characteristic. This calibration may reduce geometrically dispersed common-mode noise, including the effects of internal parasitic radiation and camera drift. The use of dedicated reference regions may free up all of the sample wells for data analysis, because none of the wells needs to be used as a reference

20 well.

7. Consumable sample well inserts

A combination of a reusable frame and a consumable sample well insert (or a set of consumable sample well inserts) configured to fit within or mate with the frame. The combination may facilitate reuse of portions of the sample holder that are expensive, such as the thermal buffer and/or thermal barrier. The combination also may facilitate disposal of portions of the sample holder that contact the sample by reducing the amount of such materials that must be discarded. The combination may be constructed so that the insert is substantially supported by the frame yet substantially thermally insulated or isolated from the frame. The frame and the sample wells may be composed of the same or preferably different materials. Here, consumable may be defined as more likely to be discarded than reused, typically because it is more convenient and/or less expensive to be discarded than reused. For example, a consumable sample well insert may obviate the need to clean sample wells between samples.

8. Cover

A cover configured for use with the sample holder. The cover generally comprises any mechanism for covering the sample holder, or a portion of the sample holder, to reduce contamination of the samples and/or to reduce evaporation from the samples (e.g., by reducing exposure to dry air and/or convective air currents), among others. The cover generally may be formed of any suitable material, such as a rigid plastic and/or a thin layer of oil or other less evaporative material layered over the sample. The cover may be infrared transmissive, so that samples may be analyzed through the cover using a top-read analyzer. The cover may be configured to touch the top surface of the sample.

Alternatively, the cover may be configured to leave an air gap between the top surface and the cover, particularly a small air gap that may quickly saturate with fluid vapor after fluid samples are positioned in the wells and before reactant or catalyst are delivered to reduce evaporative cooling during analysis. Generally, evaporation may be reduced by

5 reducing the size of the air gap, for example, by using shallow wells and/or by substantially filling the wells (for example, until the samples occupy at least about half or even about eight-tenths or nine-tenths of the volume of the sample wells). Alternatively, or in addition, evaporation may be reduced by increasing the humidity of the air adjacent the sample well or sample holder. The cover may include an aperture so that a fluid

10 delivery system such as a pipette can pierce the cover and deliver reactant fluids.

D. Examples

The following examples describe without limitation further aspects of the invention. These examples show that thermal cross talk between sample wells can be reduced by thermally isolating the sample wells and that thermal resolution and the

15 accuracy and sensitivity of thermal measurements can be enhanced by reducing noise, including common-mode, parasitic, spatial, temporal, and/or thermodynamic noise, among others. Additional examples including color drawings showing pseudocolor methods for displaying thermal imaging data are described in the following U.S. provisional patent application, which is incorporated herein by reference: Serial No.

20 60/256,852, filed December 19, 2000.

Example 1

This example describes a preferred sample holder for use in measurements of thermal processes, including chemical and physiological processes.

Figures 2 and 3 show a sample holder 200 constructed in accordance with aspects 5 of the invention. The sample holder includes a high thermal mass frame or base 202, a plurality of sample wells 204 and a corresponding plurality of windows 206, trapped volumes 208, reference regions 209, and opaque coatings 210, and a cover 212.

Frame 202 is the main structural component of sample holder 200. The frame generally may be sized and shaped as desired, for both convenience and utility. Frame 10 202 is sized and shaped to form a microplate, enabling the sample holder to be used with standard microplate equipment, such as handlers, washers, and/or readers, among others. A preferred frame is substantially rectangular, with a major dimension X of about 125-130 mm, a minor dimension Y of about 80-90 mm, and a height Z of about 5-15 mm, although other dimensions are possible. Frame 202 may include a base 214 configured to 15 facilitate handling and/or stacking, a notch 216 configured to facilitate receiving the cover, and/or a plurality of apertures 218 configured to receive and support a corresponding plurality of sample wells. The apertures provide clearance around the sample wells, creating an air gap that may provide thermal isolation between the base and the sample well. The apertures may be formed using any suitable method, including 20 machining and/or casting the frame to include the apertures. The inner surface of each aperture may be polished and/or lined with an opaque (i.e., low transmissivity) coating 210 such as AlSiO or gold to reflect infrared radiation and thus to form a thermal barrier

to heat conduction to and from the sample wells. In this embodiment, adjacent sample wells may be separated by two thermal barriers and a portion of the frame disposed between the two thermal barriers. The apertures and/or the sample wells may be tapered, such that the separation between the sample wells and the walls of the corresponding 5 apertures increases from the top to the bottom of the sample wells, further reducing conduction between the sample wells and the walls of the apertures.

The frame generally may be constructed of any suitable material. For example, frame 202 is constructed using a material having a high thermal mass (heat capacity) and high thermal conductivity, such as aluminum and/or other metals. Preferred materials 10 such as aluminum may reduce the time required for thermal stabilization within the test chamber while being sturdy enough for repeated, rugged use. In particular, a high thermal mass base (and/or an adjacent structure) may function as a thermal buffer, helping to maintain a constant temperature around sample wells positioned in apertures 218.

Sample wells 204 are used to support and separate samples 220 for calorimetric 15 analysis. These sample wells may vary in size, shape, number, and arrangement, generally as desired, as long as the wells fit in the frame, and more particularly fit within the corresponding apertures in the frame. Exemplary sizes range between about 1 μ L and about 500 μ L, and more preferably between about 1 μ L and about 200 μ L. Exemplary shapes include cones, frustums of cones, cylinders, and parallelepipeds, among others. 20 Exemplary numbers include 96, 384, 864, 1536, 3456, and 9600, among others. Exemplary arrangements include rectangular and hexagonal arrays, among others. Three

preferred sample-well configurations that will fit as rectangular arrays within a microplate-sized frame are listed in the following table:

Number of Wells	Arrangement of Wells	Pitch (mm) Between Wells	Density (/mm ²) of Wells
96	8 × 12	9	1/81
384	16 × 24	4.5	4/81
1536	32 × 48	2.25	16/81

- 5 Here, pitch is the center-to-center well-to-well spacing, and density is the number of wells per unit area. In a preferred embodiment, the frame will include a similarly spaced array of apertures for receiving the sample wells. A preferred configuration includes 96 frustoconical wells organized in an 8 × 12 rectangular array. Here, frustoconical refers to a well shape having conical sides and a flat bottom, as shown in Figure 3.
- 10 The sample wells may be formed as cups that may be inserted into the frame to hold a sample for calorimetric analysis, permitting an analyzer to measure temperature changes in the sample, for example, resulting from chemical or physiological processes. In this way, a single frame may be used to support cups of different sizes and shapes, so long as the cup (or cups) will fit within the corresponding apertures. The bottom surface
- 15 221 of the cup may be flat and/or particularly thin in areas from which infrared measurements are collected. A flat surface may serve to reduce optical distortion and control reflections coming from the surface. A thin surface may enhance infrared transmission, because infrared properties generally are proportional to material thickness. A thin surface also may help to ensure that the outer surface remains at or very close to
- 20 the temperature of the fluid.

The cup inserts may be formed individually or joined to form a sheet or sheets of cups for use in the frame. Individual cups and small sheets of cups generally provide greater flexibility, permitting cups to be mixed and matched (e.g., according to size, shape, and/or infrared transmission properties, among others) within a single plate. Large

5 sheets of cups provide greater structural stability and convenience, permitting many cups to be changed at once. As mentioned above, cup inserts generally are configured so that a single cup resides within a single aperture in the supporting frame. However, cup inserts also may be configured so that two or more cups reside within a single aperture, permitting a single frame to support cups at two or more significantly different sizes

10 and/or densities.

The material properties of the cups are important for thermal isolation and infrared transmissivity. Figure 4 shows the infrared transmissivity of a preferred cup material as a function of material thickness. This preferred material is an infrared-transmissive (polymeric) polyethylene blend sold under the trademark Poly IR 2TM by Fresnel Technologies. The material has a high infrared transmissivity that increases nonlinearly with decreasing material thickness, showing a significant increase for thicknesses below about 0.001 inches. Moreover, the material has a low coefficient of thermal conductivity (~0.6 watts/meter-kelvin), which is about 1/10 the thermal conductivity of most other infrared-transmitting materials, including Zn, Se, and Ge. In addition, the material has a

15 low thermal mass, so it should quickly assume the temperature of the sample. The low thermal mass of the cup combined with its low thermal conductivity and insulation from the base reduce heat loss to the environment. The infrared transmission properties of the

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material allow the detector to measure the temperature of the fluid through the cup with less than 10% thermal contribution from the cup. Further aspects of the preferred sample well material are described in the following U.S. provisional patent application, which is incorporated herein by reference: Serial No. 60/256,852, filed December 19, 2000.

5 Window 206 is an environmental seal between the sample well and the detector(located below the sample holder) when the sample holder is used with a bottom-read analyzer. The window may be formed of an infrared-transmissive membrane material selected to enhance infrared transmission within the spectral sensitivity band of the camera. A preferred material is zinc selenide, which provides >97% transmission to
10 the bottom surface of the sample well.

Trapped volume 208 is formed between inner surfaces of frame 202, sample well 204, and window 206. The high thermal mass frame that surrounds the sample well acts as a capacitor to maintain a constant temperature within the trapped volume, which typically contains air. The inner surfaces of the frame may be lined with an opaque
15 coating, as described above.

Reference region 209 is a source of a reference signal for use in reference calibrations to reduce common-mode and parasitic noise, among others, as described above. Generally, each sample well includes a measurement region and a corresponding reference region. The measurement region generally comprises a portion of the sample or
20 sample well, such as an infrared transmissive bottom portion of the sample well for use with bottom-read instruments. The reference region may comprise an adjacent portion of the frame, such as an annular donut-shaped portion formed around a perimeter and/or

central axis of the measurement region. Here, the reference region is positioned at an end of a support member formed by portions of the frame disposed between the sample wells. The thermal mass of the thermal reference region and associated support member may be at least about the same as or greater than the thermal mass of the corresponding sample well and/or sample. The reference region may be formed of a high thermal mass and/or high (>0.8) emissivity material such as a metal that acts as an isolated, blackbody reference. The thermal reference region may include a substantially flat emissive reference surface, where the emissive surface is substantially parallel to a flat portion of the bottom of the sample well and/or where the emissive surface is within a factor of ten of the area of a flat portion of the bottom of the sample well.

10 Cover 212 provides a mechanism for covering the sample holder, or a portion of the sample holder, to protect samples from evaporation and/or reduce the likelihood and amount of evaporation. Cover 212 generally will leave a small air gap between the sample and the cover that may saturate with fluid vapor to reduce evaporation. Cover 15 includes an aperture 222 so that a fluid delivery system such as a pipette can pierce the cover and deliver reactant fluids.

Example 2

Figure 5 shows results from an experiment designed to measure thermal cross talk caused by heat conduction through the sample plate. The experiment was performed 20 using a top-read thermal-imaging apparatus fitted with a quantum well (QWIP) infrared radiometer from FLIR Systems. The figure shows thermal images of two plates containing a fluid that evaporates when in contact with dry ambient air. Here, relative

temperature is denoted by shading, where samples with relatively high temperatures have increased shading, and samples with relatively low temperatures have reduced shading. Plate 1 (left) is fabricated using a thin polymer insert and a high thermal mass base, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Plate 2 (right) is a standard commercially available 96-well 5 microplate fabricated from a polystyrene polymer (Costar 3628). The thermal images show that plate 1 provides significantly better thermal isolation than plate 2. In particular, the wells in plate 1 are insulated from the surrounding base material, reducing thermal “cross talk” between adjacent wells, whereas the wells in plate 2 are poorly insulated, enhancing thermal “cross talk” and leading to significant thermal gradients across the 10 plate.

Example 3

This example describes results of an experiment designed to test the effects of evaporation on the apparent temperature of samples positioned in wells in a multiwell plate.

15 The experiment was performed using the top-read thermal-imaging apparatus and low cross-talk multiwell plate of Example 2. In these experiments, sets of adjacent wells were filled with fluids having various evaporation characteristics or else were covered with a high-emissivity tape, as shown below.

T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	W	W	W	A	A	A	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	W	W	W	A	A	A	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	W	W	W	A	A	A	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	O	O	O	W	W	W	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	O	O	O	W	W	W	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	O	O	O	W	W	W	T	T	T	T
T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T

Here, A = alcohol, W = water, O = mineral oil, and T = tape. Alcohol and water are prone to evaporation, whereas mineral oil and tape are not. The apparent temperature in each well was measured at fixed intervals during a 15-minute period.

5 The data show that evaporation affects the apparent temperature of the samples. Specifically, the apparent temperature of wells containing water or alcohol was about 27°C, whereas the apparent temperature of wells containing mineral oil or tape was about 29°C, or about 2°C warmer. Apparently, evaporation of water and alcohol cools the layer of gas above these fluids, leading to lower measured temperatures.

10 The data also show that evaporation affects the apparent temperature stability of the samples. Specifically, after compensating for common-mode noise, wells containing water or alcohol showed about 0.1°C peak-to-peak (PTP) temperature variations, whereas wells containing mineral oil or tape showed about 0.01°C PTP temperature variations, or about one-tenth as large. Thus, evaporation may preclude accurate measurement of small
15 thermal processes within a well containing a fluid prone to evaporation, at least if measured from above the well. Conversely, reducing evaporation may improve thermal signal and permit a more accurate measurement of thermal reactions within the well.

Example 4

This example describes results of an experiment designed to determine whether temporal noise was caused by evaporation at the surface of the fluid and whether temporal noise could be controlled by reading the fluid through a transparent film.

5 The experiment was performed using the top-read thermal-imaging apparatus and multiwell plate of Examples 2 and 3. However, here, each well was filled with water. Moreover, a first set of data was collected as above, with the water exposed to ambient air, and a second set of data was collecting after placing a thin (~0.0005-inch thick) infrared-transparent film (Poly IR II) over the wells, in direct contact with the water to
10 simulate a bottom-read design. The temperature in each well was again measured at fixed intervals during a 15-minute period.

Figure 6A (“top read”) shows the range of measured temperatures as a function of time, after subtraction of common-mode noise, reading from the surface of the exposed water. The data show significant thermodynamic noise, resulting from evaporation at the
15 surface of the water, with temperature variations of greater than about 0.1°C (PTP). This noise level would make it very difficult to derive small temperature changes resulting from chemical or physiological processes beneath the surface.

Figure 6B (“bottom read”) shows the range of measured temperatures as a function of time, after subtraction of common-mode noise, reading through the infrared-transparent film. The data show significantly reduced temporal noise, with temperature variations of less than about 0.025°C (PTP). In this case, the film reduces or prevents evaporative cooling because the fluid no is longer exposed to dry air . This reduction in

evaporative cooling reduces noise in the measurement, which allows the system to record significantly smaller changes in temperature. This measurement technique, particularly when combined with the novel multiwell plate design of Figures 2 and 3, allows accurate recording of small subsurface processes taking place in the sample well, improving 5 measurement resolution by about fourfold.

Example 5

Figure 7 shows results of an experiment designed to determine the preferred number of frames to average in the frame-averaging noise-reduction technique. The experiment was performed using top-read thermal-imaging apparatus and low cross-talk 10 multiwell plate of Examples 2-4. The experiments show the noise level at several areas of the multiwell plate, averaged over 0, 2, 4, 8, and 16 frames at 60 Hz. The following chart summarizes the data for selected areas within the image:

	Normal	2× Frames	4× Frames	8× Frames	16× Frames
Max (bit counts)	10656.00	10632.00	10632.00	10616.00	10600.00
Min (bit counts)	10560.00	10576.00	10584.00	10576.00	10568.00
Avg (bit counts)	10611.17	10604.05	10610.28	10592.24	10582.40
Range (Kelvin)	0.60	0.35	0.30	0.25	0.20
Std Dev (Kelvin)	0.10	0.07	0.05	0.04	0.04

15 Values are in 14 bit units. The “std dev” row is the root-mean-squared (RMS) noise of a uniform target after application of frame-averaging.

Example 6

Figure 8 shows results of an experiment designed to determine the level of common-mode noise typical of an infrared camera. The experiments were performed

using the apparatus and plate of Examples 2-5. The figure shows a typical raw data set after frame-averaging (high-frequency noise reduction) and area averaging, but before common-mode noise reduction and offset subtraction.

Example 7

5 Figure 9 shows results of an experiment designed to assess the ability of offset subtraction to extract data for a 135- μ W reaction in a multiwell plate. The experiments were performed using the apparatus and plate of Examples 2-6.

10 Figure 9A shows raw data for an experiment using four sample wells in which one well received a “sample” comprising a constant 135- μ W input, while the other wells received a benign (i.e., nonreactive) sample. The data show the average temperature in the measurement region as a function of time, after image averaging is applied.

15 Figure 9B shows the same data after offset subtraction, which adjusts the data so that each measurement starts at zero at time zero. There is a residual common-mode noise of approximately 0.05°C PTP, after offset subtraction. This common-mode noise may be out of phase and may shift depending on the geometric position of the cell, as shown in Figure 8.

Example 8

20 Figure 10 shows results of an experiment designed to assess the ability of offset subtraction and the reduction of common-mode noise using a reference region local to the measurement region to extract data for the 135- μ W reaction of Example 7 and Figure 9. The reduction of common-mode noise reduces the noise level for the benign wells to an

RMS level of about 0.004°C. The presence and thermal profile of the 135- μ W reaction is clearly visible relative to the benign wells. The data compare favorably to a thermal model that calculates the theoretical effect of a 135- μ W input on a sample holder having the same fluid volume. Without using the measurement and noise-reduction methods 5 described here, the reaction resulting from a 135- μ W input could not be detected using an infrared camera.

Example 9

This example describes software for performing and/or evaluating calorimetric measurements.

10 Figure 11 shows a software screen for the display of thermal data. The software screen may include one or more data presentation fields. These fields may be used to present data using any suitable form, including tables, graphs, and pseudo-images, among others. The fields may include a single display that includes or summarizes data from multiple samples, and/or multiple displays that each include or summarize data from one 15 or a subset of the multiple samples. If there are multiple displays, they may be arranged in a manner representative of the layout of the corresponding samples, such as an 8×12 array of mini-graphs corresponding to the 8×12 array of samples in a standard 96-well microplate. The data displayed in the software screens may include a characteristic of the thermal radiation detected, such as the amount, intensity, and/or spectrum of the 20 radiation. The data also may include a computed and/or processed quantity related to a characteristic of the thermal radiation detected, such as a temperature and/or a signal

processed to reduce noise. The data also may include kinetic data, such as temperature versus time (denoted “tick”). The software screen also may include software switches for selecting the scale of the display, for example, X-axis and Y-axis scales for graphical data and color schemes for pseudocolor images, among others.

5 Figures 12 and 13 show software screens for collecting, displaying, and/or calibrating data relating to the measurement and reference regions. The top screen shows the application screen for collecting data using the circular reference around the perimeter of the measurement region. The bottom screen shot shows the setup window for defining the characteristics of the reference. These screens again may include one or more data presentation fields and one or more software switches, among others. Moreover, these

10 screens may permit recording and/or reporting of system parameters, such as emissivity, object distance, ambient temperature, relative humidity, noise reduction methods, and/or sample holder format, among others.

Example 10

15 This example describes noise-reduction methods provided by aspects of the invention, particularly noise-reduction methods relating to temporal and spatial noise.

The noise-reduction methods may include (1) converting detected thermal infrared radiation to a signal, and (2) processing the signal to reduce the proportion of the signal that is attributable to noise. The step of processing the signal may include a step of (1)

20 temporally averaging the signal comprising computing a quantity based on distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the same sample at different times, and/or (2) replacing at least a portion of the

- signal with a revised portion formed from distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the same position or positions in the sample at different times. Alternatively, or in addition, the step of processing the signal may include a step of (1) spatially averaging the signal comprising computing a quantity
- 5 based on distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from different portions of the same sample, and/or (2) replacing at least a portion of the signal with a revised portion formed from distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the different positions in the sample at the same time.
- 10 The time-based methods may be used to reduce temporal noise, among others, as described above in Section B. These methods may involve replacing a portion of the signal with a revised portion formed for one or more positions in one or more samples from distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from at least two, four, eight, or sixteen different times, among others. These
- 15 methods also may involve forming a weighted average of distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the same position in the sample at different times, for example, by application of frame-averaging. In some embodiments, these methods may be adapted preferentially to reduce high-frequency temporal noise in the signal, for example, by application of a low-pass temporal filter
- 20 and/or by replacing a relatively higher number of time data points with a relatively smaller number of time data points.

The space-based methods may be used analogously to reduce spatial noise, among others, as described above in Section B. These methods may involve replacing a portion of the signal with a revised portion formed at one or more different times from distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected

5 from at least two, four, five, nine, or sixteen different positions in the sample, among others, and/or from different samples. These methods also may involve forming a weighted average of distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from different positions in the sample at the same time. In some embodiments, these methods may be adapted preferentially to reduce high-

10 frequency spatial noise in the signal, for example, by application of a low-pass spatial filter and/or by replacing a relatively higher number of spatial data points with a relatively smaller number of spatial data points.

The time-based and space-based methods may be used alone and/or together. Moreover, in many applications, both types of methods may be applied more than once to

15 a particular signal. For example, a signal may be processed by replacing a portion of the signal with a revised portion formed from distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the same sample at different times, and then re-processed by replacing at least a portion of the revised portion of the signal with a re-revised portion formed from distinguishable components of the revised portion representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the same sample at different times.

20 Here, the times used to process the signal and the times used to re-process the signal may be the same or different.

The noise-reduction methods also may include (1) detecting thermal infrared radiation transmitted from a reference region adjacent a sample, and (2) constructing a sample signal characteristic of the thermal infrared radiation detected from the sample based on the thermal infrared radiation detected from the sample (e.g., as embodied in the 5 processed signal) and the adjacent reference region. The reference region may comprise an annular portion of the sample plate distributed adjacent a perimeter and/or about a central or optical axis of the sample well.

The noise-reduction methods also may include repeating the steps of detecting, converting, and/or processing for a plurality of samples and/or reference regions. Thus, 10 the methods may include (1) detecting thermal infrared radiation transmitted from a plurality of samples positioned at a corresponding plurality of sample sites associated with the sample holder, (2) converting the thermal infrared radiation detected from each sample to a corresponding signal, and (3) processing each signal to reduce noise, as described above. The thermal infrared radiation from each sample may be detected and/or 15 processed simultaneously and/or sequentially. The signals may be adjusted before and/or after processing so that each has the same preselected value at the same preselected time. The preselected value may be zero, among others, and/or the preselected time may be zero, among others.

Example 11

20 This example describes a system, including apparatus and methods, for reducing signal disruption that may result from combining nonequilibrated compounds with samples. Additional aspects of the system are described in U.S. Provisional Patent

Application Serial No. 60/397,166, filed July 18, 2002, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

The system includes apparatus and methods for transferring one or more compounds to a sample *in situ*, where each compound is at least partially equilibrated to 5 the sample's environment before combining it with the sample. A sample's "environment," as used herein, may include one or more physical quantities pertaining to the immediate surroundings of the sample, typically a microplate well. These quantities may include, for example, temperature, pressure (and partial vapor pressures), and/or relative humidity, among others.

10 To facilitate equilibration of a compound with a sample, the compound and sample may be placed within a sealed and/or controlled common environment. The common environment may be provided with a uniform, predetermined, and carefully controlled temperature, pressure, humidity, and/or the like, which may speed up the equilibration process. The common environment may be provided, for example, in the 15 form of a separate chamber configured to contain both the compounds and the samples, along with any associated containers. Within the common environment, it may be desirable to bring the compound and sample to a particular common state before combining them, if a particular range of environmental conditions are thought to be most suitable for testing possible reactions between the compound and sample. For example, it 20 may in some instances be desirable to combine reactants in an environment that simulates the temperature of the human body.

Alternatively or in addition, the environment of the compound and sample may be sealed or otherwise isolated, to help maintain the stability and uniformity of the environment. For example, a hermetic or airtight seal may be provided to at least partially isolate the compound and the sample from the external environment, to inhibit changes in

5 the common environment of the compound and the sample.

The system optionally may determine the approach to equilibrium, or equilibration, using any suitable mechanism. (The system may simply allow a suitable period of time to pass to promote equilibration.) The time to establish equilibrium may lie, for instance, in the range between about 1-60 minutes, among others. More

10 specifically, in some embodiments, the time to establish equilibrium may be approximately 15 minutes; in other embodiments, it may be approximately 30 minutes; and, in yet other embodiments, it may be approximately 45 minutes. The time to establish equilibrium may be such that rates of change of one or more relevant physical quantities pertaining to the system fall below some predetermined acceptable maximum values.

15 Alternatively, or in addition, the system may include mechanisms, such as sensors, for determining whether a compound and sample have reached equilibrium, or suitably approached equilibrium (e.g., measured against some preselectable difference), prior to their combination. For example, for calorimetric assays, the system may include a thermal sensor (as described above) for determining whether the compound and sample

20 have (sufficiently) reached the same temperature before they are combined.

The system further may include mechanisms for performing an assay, and/or determining an assay result, based on combination of the compound and sample. These

mechanisms may measure any suitable quantity, and use any suitable detection modality. For example, the system may measure temperature changes, using an infrared camera or other sensor for measurement. Alternatively, or in addition, the system may measure oxygen concentration or hydrogen ion concentration (pH), using an oxygen probe, an ion selective electrode, and/or other sensor.

The system further may be configured to reduce disruption to the compound and sample, even after they are combined, to increase the precision and accuracy of the assay. For example, a system that forms a sealed environment to promote equilibration prior to combination of the compound and sample may maintain that sealed environment after their combination and during any subsequent assay measurements.

The system further may be partially or completely automated, such that the determination of equilibrium, the handling of the compound and sample, and/or the subsequent measurement of an assay result may occur automatically, once the system is set up.

15 11.A Single-Sample System

Figures 14A-C show cross-sectional views of portions of an exemplary system for transferring a compound to a sample *in situ*, in accordance with aspects of the invention.

Figure 14A shows a transfer device 300 disposed substantially adjacent a compound plate 302. The transfer device includes a compound holder 304 for receiving a desired amount of a compound C₁ stored within the compound plate. The compound holder typically is part of a transfer device, such as a pipette, needle/syringe, or pump, commonly used to transfer material from one location to another.

Figure 14B shows transfer device 300 placed within a well 306 of a sample plate 308, so that a droplet (or, in general, any desired quantity) of compound C₁ is disposed substantially adjacent to a sample S₁ that is disposed within the well. In this position, compound C₁ and sample S₁ share a substantially common environment, including such
5 environmental characteristics as temperature, pressure, relative humidity, and the like. The transfer device may be held in place, as shown, for any desired period of time, such as for approximately 15-30 minutes, until the compound and the sample equilibrate. Typically, transfer device 300 forms a seal with an upper portion 310 of sample well 306, so that the common environment remains relatively stable during the equilibration
10 process. This seal may be substantially hermetic, to inhibit changes in the common environment. In some embodiments, the transfer device and the sample plate may both be placed in an environmentally controlled chamber, to further ensure a substantially stable and uniform environment. As described above, the environmentally controlled chamber may be provided with a predetermined temperature, pressure, and/or humidity, among
15 other environmental properties, to facilitate a desired reaction and/or to simulate desired reaction conditions. Boundaries of the chamber may include surfaces of low thermal conductivity and/or porosity, to additionally inhibit changes to the environment provided by the chamber.

Figure 14C shows how, following equilibration of compound C₁ and sample S₁,
20 the compound may be added to the sample. By combining the compound with the sample after equilibration within the same environment, signal deviation of various measurable quantities may be substantially reduced, leading to greater measurement sensitivity. For

example, thermal signal deviation may be reduced, so that the system may be particularly well suited for detection of thermal radiation resulting from the mixture of the compound with the sample. The system components (including any sealed environment) may be held in place during measurements, to reduce disruptions even further.

5 The system may be well suited for use with various other measurement techniques. These techniques may include optical and/or nonoptical techniques, among others. These techniques may measure a quantity of interest (e.g., heat of reaction, oxygen concentration, hydrogen ion concentration (pH), metabolite or catabolite concentration) directly, or they may measure the quantity indirectly (e.g., using a suitable
10 reporter moiety).

11.B Multi-Sample System

Figures 15A-C show cross-sectional views of an exemplary system for transferring a compound to a sample *in situ*, similar to the system embodied in Figures 14A-C. However, the system shown in Figures 15A-C may be used in conjunction with a
15 multiwell compound plate and/or a multiwell sample plate, to equilibrate one or more compounds with one or more samples, and then to deliver the compounds to the samples.

The system may include a multi-compound transfer device 400, including a plurality of compound holders 402, as depicted in Figure 15A. Each compound holder may be in fluid communication with a receiver cavity 404 for receiving and temporarily
20 storing various compounds such as compound C₁. Transfer device 400 may include an actuator plate 406, and an upper plate 408 configured to receive the actuator plate. The actuator plate may include actuators such as a plurality of pistons 410, which fit within

corresponding receiver cavities 404 within the upper plate. O-rings 412 may be used to form an airtight seal between pistons 408 and receiving cavities 410.

Multi-compound transfer device 400 typically is placed over a multiwell compound plate 414 containing a plurality of compounds, generally indicated in Figure 5 15A at C₁, C₂, and C₃, which are disposed within wells 416 of the compound plate. More generally, compounds may be stored in any storage container suitable for withdrawal of a desired amount of compound, i.e., any container configured such that compound holders 402 may be placed in fluid communication with the compounds. Upward displacement of the actuator plate causes corresponding upward motion of pistons 410, creating a partial 10 vacuum in the compound holders and in the receiver cavities. This has the effect of withdrawing compound material from wells 416 of the compound plate or other storage container, and into the compound holders and/or receiver cavities (the exact disposition of the compound material may depend on the precise amount of compound drawn into the transfer device).

15 Once compounds are disposed within the compound holders and/or the corresponding receiver cavities, multi-compound transfer device 400 may be positioned above a sample storage container such as a multiwell sample plate 418, as depicted in Figure 15B, and the compounds allowed to equilibrate with the sample(s) in the sample plate wells. As in the case of a single-sample system, the equilibration process may be 20 sped up or otherwise enhanced through the use of a seal, such as a hermetic seal, between the transfer device and the sample plate, and/or by placing the transfer device and the

sample plate into a common environment, for example, into a chamber that provides controlled and predetermined environmental conditions.

Then, as depicted in Figure 15C, actuator plate 406 may be displaced downward, causing a corresponding downward motion of pistons 410, and dispensing the compounds 5 into the sample plate, where they combine and possibly react with the samples disposed there. As described previously, signal deviation of various measurable quantities typically will be reduced substantially due to the equilibration of the compounds with the samples, leading to a greater signal-to-noise ratio, and thus to greater measurement sensitivity.

11.C Conclusions

10 Placing potential reactants in an environmentally controlled space, as described above, may have certain additional advantages. For example, the seal formed between the compound transfer device and the sample plate (e.g., by o-rings 412) may isolate the reactants from accidental human contact, leading to enhanced safety when one or both of the reactants is a hazardous material. Additionally, coupling together the transfer device 15 and sample plate in the manner described may allow the system to be conveniently transported and/or stored as an integrated unit, and may facilitate remotely and/or automatically dispensing the compounds into the sample plate.

Example 12

This example describes the use of a gas of relatively low thermal conductivity to 20 enhance the signal-to-noise ratio of a signal produced by the byproducts of a reaction between two reactive constituents in a sample well. Additional aspects of the system are

described in U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/397,336, filed July 18, 2002, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

Figures 2 and 3 show a microplate 200 suitable for studies of multiple samples. Microplate 200 includes trapped volumes 208, which are formed between inner surfaces 5 of frame 202, sample well 204, and window 206. To reduce thermal communication between sample wells, the trapped volumes may be at least partially evacuated, creating a (partial) vacuum, and/or may include a gas of relatively low thermal conductivity. A gas of relatively low thermal conductivity, as used herein, typically comprises any gas or mixture of gases having a thermal conductivity value of less than about 0.026 watts/m-K, 10 which is the thermal conductivity of ambient air. The gas may be inert and/or monatomic, among others, and may comprise argon, krypton, xenon, radon, and/or carbon dioxide, among others. The table below shows accepted values for thermal conductivities of several representative gases at atmospheric pressure and room temperature:

Thermally Conductive Medium	Thermal Conductivity (W/m°K)
Ambient Air	0.0260
Carbon Dioxide	0.0170
Argon	0.0180
Xenon	0.0057
Krypton	0.0094
Vacuum	0.0000

15

The gas of relatively low thermal conductivity may be sealed statically within trapped volume 208 to substantially reduce convection currents that would otherwise exist for a non-trapped volume. Alternatively, the gas may be flushed dynamically

through each trapped volume, to substantially purge residual air surrounding the sample well. If flushed, the gas may be provided at a constant or variable flow rate, typically at a predetermined time or for a predetermined interval prior to initiating a reaction. The high thermal mass frame that surrounds the sample well may act as a capacitor to maintain a 5 constant temperature of the gas within trapped volume 208. The inner surfaces of the frame may be lined with an opaque coating, as described previously.

Figures 16 and 17 show results from a set of experiments designed to measure thermal signals from a sample well that is surrounded by ambient air (Figure 16), or by xenon gas (Figure 17). The experiments were performed using a gas source to dispense a 10 gas having relatively low thermal conductivity to an environmentally controlled chamber (not shown) in which microplate 200 was disposed. The assembly was configured so that the chamber could be purged with gas while simultaneously recording thermal data from the bottom of the sample plate.

Figure 16 shows a plot of temperature differential as a function of time for the 15 addition of a constant amount of heat ($150 \mu\text{Watts}$) to a sample well surrounded by ambient air. There was a net rise in the temperature in response to the added heat, which leveled out after approximately five minutes (as thermal equilibrium was approached). About eight minutes into the experiment, the emitter was turned off, and the thermal signal decayed to the control value. Here, the maximum signal intensity detected from the 20 sample well was approximately 30 mK , for $150 \mu\text{Watts}$ of input energy.

In contrast, Figure 17 shows a plot of temperature differential as a function of time for a sample well surrounded by xenon gas. Initially, the chamber was flooded with

xenon gas at a rate of about 1 L/min to purge ambient air from the chamber. As described above, the thermal conductivity value for xenon gas is 0.0057 w/m-K, which is less than that of ambient air (0.026 w/m-K). Consequently, there was an increase in the magnitude of thermal signal intensity from 30 mK to 62 mK, with little or no increase in the 5 observed background noise, for the same amount input energy (150 μ Watts). The data show that a reduction in the thermal conductivity of the medium surrounding the sample well may reduce heat transfer/loss and improve signal detection during calorimetric measurements.

Example 13

10 This example describes results of an experiment designed to test the effects on thermal signal when the medium surrounding a sample well is changed from air to xenon. Additional aspects of the experiment are described in U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/397,336, filed July 18, 2002, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

15 The experiment was performed using the thermal detection assembly of Example 12. In this experiment, the chamber was flooded with ambient air at rate of 1L/min, before heat (150 μ Watts) was added to the well. After the addition of heat, and about eight minutes into the experiment, the ambient air was shut off, and the chamber was flooded with xenon gas (1L/min).

20 Figure 18 shows a plot of temperature differential as a function of time for a sample well initially surrounded by air and then by xenon gas. Similar to the results shown in Figure 16, an initial increase in temperature was observed corresponding to the

addition of heat to the well, followed by a plateau corresponding to an approach towards thermal equilibrium. Upon flooding the chamber with xenon gas to purge ambient air from the chamber, an additional two-fold increase in thermal signal intensity was observed. This data shows, in a single experiment, the approximate net gain in the 5 magnitude of detected thermal signal when the thermal conductivity of the medium surrounding the sample well is reduced, relative to that of ambient air.

Example 14

This example describes without limitation selected aspects and embodiments of the invention, presented as a series of numbered paragraphs.

10 A. A method of detecting a reaction byproduct produced by combining a compound with a sample, comprising (1) providing a compound physically separated from a sample; (2) sealing the compound and the sample in a common environment; (3) waiting a predetermined time to allow the compound and the sample to at least partially equilibrate with the common environment; (4) combining the compound with the sample; 15 and (5) detecting a reaction byproduct resulting from combining the compound with the sample.

 A.1 The method of paragraph A, further comprising moving the compound and the sample into the common environment, wherein the step of moving is performed before the step of sealing.

20 A.2 The method of paragraph A, the compound and the sample being a first compound and a first sample, respectively, further comprising repeating the steps of

providing, sealing, allowing, combining, and detecting for a second compound and a second sample.

A.3.1 The method of paragraph A.3, wherein the first and second samples are positioned in a common sample holder.

5 A.3.1.1 The method of paragraph A.3.1, wherein the first and second samples are positioned in respective wells of a microplate.

A.4 The method of paragraph A, wherein the steps of providing, sealing, allowing, combining, and detecting are performed at least substantially automatically.

10 A.5 The method of paragraph A, wherein the step of detecting is performed without removing the mixture formed by combining the compound with the sample from the common environment.

A.6 The method of paragraph A, further comprising holding the relative positions of the compound and the sample at least substantially fixed, during the step of waiting.

15 A.7 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is thermal radiation.

A.8 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is luminescence radiation.

20 A.9 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is optical radiation.

A.10 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is a change in concentration of a constituent of at least one of the compound and the sample.

A.11 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is a metabolite or a catabolite.

A.12 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is a change in oxygen concentration.

5 A.13 The method of paragraph A, wherein the reaction byproduct is a change in hydrogen ion concentration (pH).

A.14 The method of paragraph A, wherein the predetermined time is between about 15 and 45 minutes.

A.15 The method of paragraph A, wherein the size of the common environment
10 is comparable to the size of a sample holder supporting the sample.

B. A system for detecting a reaction byproduct, comprising (1) a sample substrate having a plurality of discrete sample sites configured to support a corresponding plurality of samples; (2) a transfer device configured to transport one or more compounds to the sample substrate and to hold the compounds in a fixed position relative to the
15 samples until the compounds and the samples are equilibrated to a substantially similar state; and (3) a detector configured to detect the reaction byproduct.

B.1 The system of paragraph B, wherein the detector comprises an optical device having an examination site and a detector, the optical device being configured preferentially to detect thermal infrared radiation transmitted from a sample positioned at
20 a corresponding sample site at the examination site.

B.1.1 The system of paragraph B.1, further comprising a processor incorporating instructions for and capable of carrying out the function of reducing noise by replacing at

least a portion of the signal with a revised portion formed from distinguishable components of the signal representing thermal infrared radiation detected from the same position in the sample at different times or from different positions in the sample at the same time.

5 B.2 The system of paragraph B, wherein the transfer device includes an actuator mechanism for actuating transfer of the compounds to and from the transfer device, and a plurality of compound holders for holding the compounds within the transfer device.

10 B.2.1 The system of paragraph B.2, wherein the actuator mechanism includes an actuator plate, and a plurality of pistons connected to the actuator plate and in fluid communication with the compound holders.

B.2.2 The system of paragraph B.2, wherein the transfer device is configured such that the compound holders form a secure interface with the sample sites.

B.2.2.1 The system of paragraph B.2.2, wherein the interface is substantially impermeable.

15 B.2.2.2 The system of paragraph B.2.2, wherein the interface is a substantially hermetic seal.

B3. The system of paragraph B, further comprising a chamber configured to provide a controlled common environment for the sample substrate and the transfer device.

20 C. A plate for holding a plurality of samples, comprising (1) a frame; (2) a plurality of sample wells disposed in the frame for holding a corresponding plurality of samples; (3) a thermal isolation structure associated with the frame and disposed between

the sample wells to reduce thermal transfer between adjacent sample wells; and (4) a plurality of trapped volumes corresponding to each sample well, the trapped volumes being formed between an outer surface of the sample wells and an inner surface of the corresponding isolation wells, the trapped volumes further reducing thermal transfer to
5 and from samples in the sample wells.

C.1 The plate of paragraph C, wherein the trapped volume includes air.

C.2 The plate of paragraph C, wherein the trapped volume is at least partially evacuated relative to standard atmospheric pressure.

C.3 The plate of paragraph C, wherein at least a portion of the trapped volume
10 is lined by an infrared-reflective material.

C.4 The plate of paragraph C, wherein the trapped volume includes a gas with thermal conductivity less than about 0.026 watts/m-K.

C.4.1 The plate of paragraph C4, wherein the gas is carbon dioxide.

C.4.2 The plate of paragraph C4, wherein the gas is argon.

C.4.3 The plate of paragraph C4, wherein the gas is xenon.
15

D. A plate for holding a plurality of samples, comprising (1) a frame; (2) a plurality of isolation wells disposed in the frame; (3) a corresponding sample well for holding a corresponding sample disposed in each of the isolation wells; and (4) a plurality of trapped volumes corresponding to each sample well, wherein the trapped volumes are
20 formed between an outer surface of the sample wells and an inner surface of the corresponding isolation wells, the trapped volumes further reducing thermal transfer to

and from samples in the sample wells; wherein none of the isolation wells and sample wells is in fluid contact with another of the isolation wells and sample wells.

D.1 The plate of paragraph D, wherein the trapped volume includes air.

D.2 The plate of paragraph D, wherein the trapped volume is at least partially
5 evacuated relative to standard atmospheric pressure.

D.3 The plate of paragraph D, wherein at least a portion of the trapped volume
is lined by an infrared-reflective material.

D.4 The plate of paragraph D, wherein the trapped volume includes a gas with
thermal conductivity less than 0.026 watts/m-K.

10 D.4.1 The plate of paragraph D4, wherein the gas is carbon dioxide.

D.4.2 The plate of paragraph D4, wherein the gas is argon.

D.4.3 The plate of paragraph D4, wherein the gas is xenon.

E. A system for detecting thermal infrared radiation, comprising (1) a sample
plate having a plurality of sample wells for holding a corresponding plurality of samples,
15 each sample well having at least one infrared-transmissive surface configured to transmit
thermal infrared radiation emitted by a sample positioned within the well; and (2) an
optical device configured preferentially to detect thermal infrared radiation transmitted
from a sample through the infrared-transmissive surface of the corresponding sample
well; wherein a gas, having a thermal conductivity less than that of ambient air, is
20 disposed between each sample well and the optical device to reduce heat loss from
samples contained within the sample wells during calorimetric measurements.

The disclosure set forth above encompasses multiple distinct inventions with independent utility. Although each of these inventions has been disclosed in its preferred form(s), the specific embodiments thereof as disclosed and illustrated herein are not to be considered in a limiting sense, because numerous variations are possible. The subject
5 matter of the inventions includes all novel and nonobvious combinations and subcombinations of the various elements, features, functions, and/or properties disclosed herein. The following claims particularly point out certain combinations and subcombinations regarded as novel and nonobvious and directed to one of the inventions. These claims may refer to "an" element or "a first" element or the equivalent thereof;
10 such claims should be understood to include incorporation of one or more such elements, neither requiring nor excluding two or more such elements. Inventions embodied in other combinations and subcombinations of features, functions, elements, and/or properties may be claimed through amendment of the present claims or through presentation of new claims in this or a related application. Such claims, whether directed to a different
15 invention or to the same invention, and whether broader, narrower, equal, or different in scope to the original claims, also are regarded as included within the subject matter of the inventions of the present disclosure.